

The Rev. Kimberly Reinholz
Grace and Holy Trinity Church
December 1, 2019

Isaiah 2:1-5

The time will come when nations will gather at God's holy mountain, beat swords into plowshares, and war will cease. I long for this day. I hold my breath and wait for a day when violence and hatred end and we can all live together in peace. God promises that this will happen. However, sometimes I wonder if I will get to see it. There have been millennia of human existence and I think peace is something that almost every person strives for, but none of us have seen this happen. Or haven't we?

Have we been to the mountaintop and come down and gotten bogged down by our own expectations so in essence we begin to ignore it? Have we missed the opportunity for peace time and again? I think that the season of Advent is one of the unabashed expectations. Hoping and dreaming of a future which has to be better than this.

Is "better than this" truly something to work towards? Advent is not about vision boards and future plans, it's not even really about pink and purple candles or countdown calendars. Although they are good practices to remind us of what Advent is really all about.

Advent is about keeping our eyes open, watching for the Son of Man. Advent is about being vigilant, waiting for the coming of Christ. Advent is about being aware, expecting the unexpected in our daily life and work. Expect to be surprised. Expect to be frightened. Expect things to change. Be aware. Not beware because the Son of God is coming at an unexpected hour.

This week I binged on the podcast Dolly Parton's America. I'm not sure really why I started to listen, I'm not particularly a fan of Dolly or country music. An 80's child I thought ditzy blonde, the butt of all kinds of sexist

jokes when I thought of Dolly. I had only heard a handful of her songs, you probably know the ones I knew to "Jolene", "9 to 5", "I will always love you" and that one with Kenny Rogers.

Like I said I wasn't sure what I was expecting to hear when I plugged in my earbuds to walk the dog, and started listening to Jad Abumrad a 30 something-year-old podcaster interview the country music mogul. But I can tell you it wasn't a new avenue for understanding scripture. I am sure it wasn't a new way to come to the mountaintop, I'm sure it wasn't that I was looking for inspiration for this sermon in particular.

But the Holy Spirit shows up in unexpected places. It's the nature of Advent to live into that expectation of the unexpected and revel in it. It's hard to revel in the Gospel for today - where are we supposed to find joy in this story which seems to say some are chosen while others are not? Where are we supposed to find ourselves? Either we are "chosen" or "left behind" and no matter what we think of our own coworkers, classmates, and colleagues it would be hard to imagine a world where half of the human population suddenly disappears. It is the stuff of sci-fi and horror genres right? We know what to expect with this prediction mayhem and devastation, its the same in every zombie, plague, post-nuclear war film choose your own adventure, Mad Max, Left Behind, The Omen, Water World the list goes on and on.

What if we shift that expectation slightly, what if the coming of the Son of Man isn't quite what Hollywood and the networks lead us to believe but is instead more like the world we know more like the world we live in right now. Where some are privileged, and some are discriminated against. Where some succeed, and others fail based on external factors beyond their own control. Where some are powerful and others are powerless. When those sitting in honorable seats seem chosen and can ignore needs of those living on the margins.

This is where I want to invite us to engage with today's scripture in the world where we think we know what to expect. A world where this week I

found myself sitting on a bench in the field behind my house with my dog at sunset listening to Jad talk about visiting Dolly Parton's Tennessee Mountain Home. His description of being on the mountain included the odd feeling that he had been there before, even though he knew he had not. Only resolved after a time of reflection when he realized that he felt a familiarity with the country home because it was so much like his father's family home in Lebanon.

Interestingly enough his father's home and Dolly's home are situated at the same altitude and had basically the same amount of square footage, so while they are thousands of miles apart it wasn't surprising that he would feel a familiarity with the experience. Many folks would possibly share that experience with Jad and Dolly - especially those who have heard the song "My Tennessee Mountain Home" and there are apparently quite a few people for whom this song reminds them of home.

So here's what I found myself pondering while the sun set over the baseball field and Indy and I sat listening to the retelling of the story called "Tennessee Mountain Trance" I wonder how many of us have a feeling that we may have been to the mountaintop before. I know many of you have fond memories of Shrine Mont and North Mountain, for me my childhood mountains were the White Mountains of New Hampshire, for my daughter the mountain she wants to climb more than any is Fuji, and for others there are other Holy Mountains- you know the big ones, Olympus, Arrat, Zion, Kilimanjaro. People from all over the world have found themselves standing at the top of God's Holy Mountains and while not all of us are out climbing to extraordinary heights physically, we know that in our spiritual journeys we are invited to make our way to the mountain top.

It is hard to hear the prophecy from Isaiah without hearing the voice of Dr King ringing in my ears. I find myself wondering if we can come together on the mountain top and bring back with us the reality of a world where we can live together in peace. A world where we live into our expected and unexpected identities. A world where no one is left outside, no one is left feeling abandoned or excluded, a world where no one is hungry or thirsty or

alone or suffering. A world where war is no longer the answer is certainly unexpected.

A world where we can recognize that sometimes we need fresh air and a shift in perspective to recognize the holiness of the other person the blessedness is a holy mountain the sacredness of the ordinary. We are starting this season of advent again- a time of expecting the unexpected a time of infinite possibilities a time when we can truly begin to understand that we are called to God's holy mountain to see what we see and to come back and make the dream a reality.

Waiting doesn't mean we can't do anything in the mean time.
Being aware doesn't mean we are stuck doing the same things and resulting in the same outcomes.

Just because it always has been doesn't mean it always will be. Right? That is the hope of advent, that no one will be left behind. Like we heard last week by our faith we will be with Christ in paradise, it doesn't mean we shouldn't strive to gather together and make the changes in the world which we plan to see in the time to come and in the life ever lasting.

So whose is prepared to what some people may call insane - to do the things we have always done and expect a new result? To go to a place where everyone belongs the mountain home where all are welcome and where peace will reign supreme where we can begin making those swords into ploughshares and seeing a more just and peaceful world.